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## Foster Botanic Garden, 1853–1990: Contributions of a Doctor, a Donor, a Forester, and a Park Architect

On May 15, 1955, Foster Botanic Garden celebrated the opening of a new entrance and the completion of extensive renovations with a grand afternoon of music, refreshments, special exhibits, and “garden rambles,” but probably the most important symbolic gesture of the afternoon was the unveiling of a plaque reading:

Foster Park Botanical Gardens  
Dedicated to  
William Hillebrand  
Founder  
Mary E. Foster  
Donor  
Harold L. Lyon  
First Director  
Board of Public Parks and Recreation  
City and County of Honolulu  
1955

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## THE GARDEN

What is the Foster Park Botanical Garden? Now officially named Foster Botanical Garden, it covers just over 13.5 acres in the heart of the City of Honolulu.<sup>1</sup> Bounded by Nuʻuanu Stream on the *ʻEwa* [western] side, Nuʻuanu Avenue (sometimes called Nuʻuanu Street or Road in older records) on the Waikīkī [eastern] side, a path on the *mauka* [inland] edge where School Street has been put through, and a portion of Nuʻuanu Stream and what was a vineyard on the *makai* [seaward] side. While Nuʻuanu Stream was the major waterway there were also two *ʻauwai* or irrigation ditches, one roughly parallel to Nuʻuanu Avenue and the other feeding from Nuʻuanu Stream on the *ʻEwa* side of the Garden.

Early visitors to Honolulu at the beginning of the 19th century wrote of the bare and uncultivated plains *mauka* of Honolulu Harbor. In 1809, Archibald Campbell, a Scots seaman, described the land behind “Hanaroora” this way:

A small river runs by the back of the village, and joins the sea at the west side of the harbour; owing to the flatness of the country, the water is brackish, and there is none fresh to be had within several miles of the place.<sup>2</sup>

This is obviously a description of the land below or *makai* of Foster Botanic Garden, for where the Garden begins the land rises.

Thirteen years later the British missionary William Ellis, who seems to have ventured farther upland into the area that is now Foster Botanical Garden wrote:

The mouth of the valley [Nuʻuanu], which opens immediately behind the town of Honoruru, is a complete garden, carefully kept by its pro-

<sup>1</sup> *HSB*, 14 May 1955; *HA*, 14–16 May 1955. The name of Foster Garden has varied. In Mrs. Foster’s will she specified that her garden be called Foster Park. Years later, when the acreage was expanded and emphasis shifted to a botanic garden, the name was changed to Foster Botanic Garden. In the 1990s, it was changed to Foster Botanical Garden, its name today.

<sup>2</sup> Archibald Campbell, *A Voyage Round the World, from 1806 to 1812*, Facsimile Reproduction of 3<sup>rd</sup> American Edition of 1822 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1967) 112–13.

prietors in a state of high cultivation; and the ground being irrigated by the water from a river that winds rapidly down the valley, is remarkably productive.<sup>3</sup>

Probably the first foreigner to create a garden in Nu‘uanu Valley close to Honolulu was a Spaniard, Don Francisco de Paula Marin who, in 1815, planted a “new vineyard” just *makai* of what is now Foster Botanical Garden. There were also a number of Hawaiians farming the irrigated land along Nu‘uanu Avenue and Nu‘uanu Stream.<sup>4</sup>

During the great land division of 1848, the Mahele, when all the land in the Hawaiian Islands was initially divided between the king and the chiefs, the area that is now Foster Botanical Garden was divided into two unequal portions. Waikahalulu [the roaring water] was allotted to Queen Kalama, the wife of Kamehameha III, and Kalāwahine [the day of the women] went to Aaronā Kealiiahonua, a son of the last king of Kaua‘i. His original grant was interrupted by a slice of ‘Auwaiolimu [the mossy ditch] which was designated as Crown Lands, reserved for the personal use of Kamehameha III.<sup>5</sup>

As all lands divided between the king and his chiefs were subject to the rights of the people who were then living on the land as tenants, these divisions were soon subdivided. By 1854, the portion of ‘Auwaiolimu that was within what is now Foster Botanical Garden, had five individual owners, and Queen Kalama shared Waikahalulu with ten *maka‘āinana* [commoners] who had proved that they had lived on the land for over ten years.<sup>6</sup>

This division of land among the *ali‘i* [chiefs] and then the successful claims of a number of tenants to portions of the chiefly lands, illustrate a process by which large grants to the chiefs could be quickly subdivided and rendered useless to the chiefs. The tenants

<sup>3</sup> William Ellis, *Journal of William Ellis* (Honolulu: Reprint by Advertiser Publishing Company Ltd. 1963) 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ross H Gast, *Don Francisco de Paula Marin: A Biography. The Letters and Journals of Francisco de Paula Marin*, edited by Agnes C. Conrad (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai‘i for the Hawaiian Historical Society, 1973) 50.

<sup>5</sup> Mahele Book, AH.

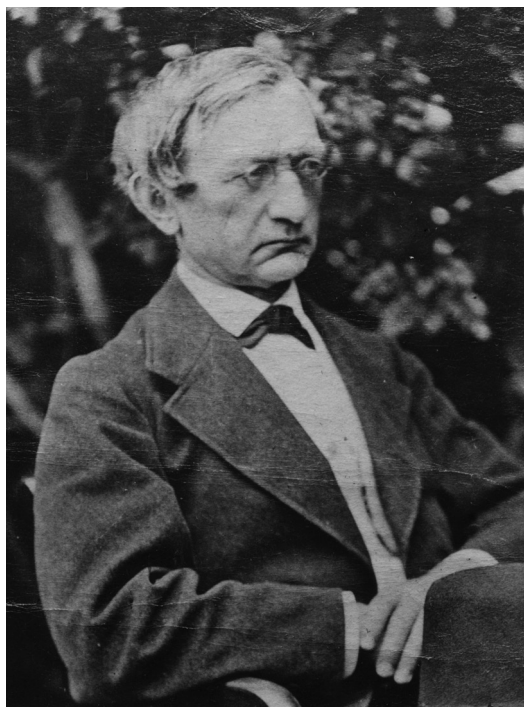
<sup>6</sup> HBC Records. See also Rhoda E. A. Hackler, “Foster Botanic Garden” (manuscript prepared for the Friends of Foster Garden, December, 1986.) Appendix, 137–64.

received productive acreage along the available sources of water and with easy access to roads, while the chiefs were often left with the less desirable, often non-contiguous parcels, cut off from irrigation and transportation.

The history of Foster Garden dates back to the 1850s and was the creation first of Dr. William F. Hillebrand, then of Mary Robinson Foster, Dr. Harold L. Lyon, and Paul R. Weissich.

#### DR. WILLIAM F. HILLEBRAND

In late December of 1850, a young medical doctor from Germany landed in Hawai'i in search of a salubrious climate where he could recover his health. Born in Nieheim, Westphalia, Prussia, on November 13, 1821, William F. Hillebrand was the son of Judge Franz Joseph Hillebrand and Louise Pauline Koenig. He studied at Goettinger,



Dr. William F. Hillebrand. Honolulu Botanical Gardens.



View of Dr. Hillebrand's Home, Nu'uauu, in 1853 by Paul Emmert. Lithograph, Hawaiian Historical Society.

Heidelberg, and received his medical degree from Berlin, where an important part of his instruction was medicinal botany. He began his medical practice in Prussia but fell ill and was advised to seek a warmer climate for his health.

Hillebrand first visited Australia, then the Philippines, where he tried to resume the practice of medicine only to exhaust himself and fall ill again. He then moved east across the Pacific to Hawai'i, where he found refuge in the Honolulu home of one of the American doctors already in practice there, Dr. Wesley Newcomb.

In the reviving climate of Hawai'i, and perhaps with the tender loving care of Dr. Newcomb's stepdaughter Anna Post, Hillebrand

recovered remarkably. He began a medical career in Honolulu and, on November 16, 1852, he and Anna were married.<sup>7</sup>

Photographs of Hillebrand depict him as rather stern, but contemporary descriptions give quite a different picture of the man. In his middle age he was:

. . . a quiet, sober, practical man of medium height and weight, complexion fair, eyes gray and as possessing an abundance of rather dark hair. He was fond of his family and took particular interest in the education of his children, two sons, William Francis and Henry Thomas. . . . The Doctor was very fond of music and enjoyed playing on the piano, but his favorite recreation was that of working among his horticultural specimens in his home garden.<sup>8</sup>

Hillebrand's father-in-law, Dr. Wesley Newcomb, was among the original members of the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society founded in 1850<sup>9</sup> and in 1853, Hillebrand joined that organization. He immediately distinguished himself as a strong advocate of a botanical garden and nursery for Honolulu.<sup>10</sup>

In 1855, Hillebrand leased 1 38/100 acres of land in Waikahalulu from Queen Kalama where he began to assemble a collection of some 160 botanical species.<sup>11</sup> During the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, in spite of a busy medical practice and family obligations, Hillebrand continued to expand his acreage by lease and purchase and add to the number and variety of planted species.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1869, J. M. Lydgate, then only a boy but later a minister in Hawai'i, was allowed to join Hillebrand on his collecting expeditions to the other islands. He described his mentor as:

. . . always a gentleman in the largest sense of the word—genial, kindly, natural and easy, but never common or coarse in the slightest degree.

<sup>7</sup> William T. Pope, "Dr. William Hillebrand, 1821–1886," *HAA* (1918) 53–60; Ursula H. Meier, *Dr. William Hillebrand: Pioneer Botanist, His Life and Letters* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2005); Record of Marriages, 0-19b: 24, AH.

<sup>8</sup> Pope, *HAA* 1918: 59.

<sup>9</sup> RHAS, 1 (1) 1850, 5–9.

<sup>10</sup> RHAS, 1 (4) 1853, 165, 168.

<sup>11</sup> RHAS, 2 (2), 1854, 110–13 and 160–61.

<sup>12</sup> HBC Records; Hackler, 122, n.22 and 23.

He was most companionable and interesting, yet always in a dignified and courteous way. He was unvaryingly patient, as he sometime had to be, with a more or less irresponsible boy like me. . . .

Intellectually and socially he was a man of most varied and valuable attainments, well versed along many lines, and at home on many subjects, and in any surroundings. He was undoubtedly one of the most valuable men who have made the Islands their home, and his memory will be treasured as such.<sup>13</sup>

Young Lydgate was welcome in the Hillebrand home and he recollects, "I spent memorable happy days with him at his simple home in the midst of the wonderful garden which he had created filled with strange and beautiful plants and trees that he had gathered from all parts of the world."<sup>14</sup>

Hillebrand also initiated an extensive correspondence with botanical gardens in Paris, Rio de Janeiro, the Royal Herbarium at Kew outside of London, and the Berlin Museum in an effort to begin a regular and organized exchange of seeds between Hawai'i and other botanical gardens.<sup>15</sup>

In Honolulu Hillebrand suggested that his fellow citizens line the streets with shade trees so that the high winds crossing the Pali would be checked and the trees might also form a barrier against fire.<sup>16</sup>

As a medical practitioner Dr. Hillebrand was also concerned with the physical wellbeing of the Hawaiian people. By 1859, he had opened a small hospital and dispensary at the foot of Fort Street and, when The Queen's Hospital was completed at Punchbowl and Beretania the next year, he was named head physician.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the 1860s Hillebrand also remained active in the community. He was doctor to the royal family, a member of the Board of Health and the Sanitation Commission, and the Bureau of Immigra-

<sup>13</sup> J.M. Lydgate, "Reminiscences of an Amateur Collector," *HAA* (1921) 67.

<sup>14</sup> J.M. Lydgate, "Scientific Treasure Trove," *HAA* (1918) 60.

<sup>15</sup> *RHAS*, 2 (2), 1855, 65-68.

<sup>16</sup> *RHAS*, 2 (3), 1856, 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 2 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1966) 71-72; C.C. Bennett, *Honolulu Directory, and Historical Sketch of the Hawaiian or Sandwich Islands* (Honolulu: C.C. Bennett, 1869) 81.

tion.<sup>18</sup> This last appointment provided him with a golden opportunity to combine his medical and horticultural interests during his first official trip to Asia for the Bureau of Immigration in 1865. While he investigated the possibilities of recruiting labor for Hawai'i and consulted with physicians in Asia on treatments for leprosy, he also took a lively interest in the seeds, plants, and animals he encountered in the tropical countries he visited. He returned to Honolulu with 30 Wardian cases (forerunner of the terrarium) of plants and with cases of birds and seeds from Singapore, Calcutta, Ceylon, Java, and China. As a result of this one trip he introduced into the islands camphor, cinnamon, mandarin oranges, Chinese plums, jackfruit, Java plums, litchi, several species of *Eugenia*, and banyans and other ornamental shade and flowering trees. He imported carrion crows from Calcutta, two kinds of gold finches, Indian sparrows, Japanese finches, Chinese quails, silver pheasants, Mongolian and golden pheasants, linnets, ricebirds and mynah birds, and a pair of deer from both China and Japan.<sup>19</sup>

When Hillebrand and his family left Hawai'i for Europe, in June of 1871, they visited England, Germany, Switzerland, and the islands of Madeira and Tenerife for varying lengths of time but they never returned to the Pacific. The doctor immersed himself in writing up the results of his years of horticultural and botanical research and propagation in Hawai'i, and just before his death in Heidelberg on July 13, 1886, he finished his definitive book *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*. His son, William Francis Hillebrand, arranged for its publication in 1888 and it was he who dedicated it, for his father and all the Hillebrand family, "to the Hawaiian People, whose kindly traits of character he learned thoroughly to appreciate and to whose welfare his best energies were devoted during a residence of twenty years

<sup>18</sup> Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 2, 73 and 180–81; PCR, book 11: 55, 93, 127, 223, AH.

<sup>19</sup> "Report on Supply and Labor, etc. by the Hon. Wm. Hillebrand, M.D. Royal Commissioner to China and India, to the Honorable Board of Immigration of the Hawaiian Islands," Honolulu: 1867, also printed in the *HG*, 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 Dec. 1866; ID Kingdom of Hawaii, File Box 52, AH; Pope, *AHH* (1918) 56; *HG*, 1 May 1867: 3.



among them, the recollections of which sojourn were to him a never failing source of pleasure while life lasted.”<sup>20</sup>

#### MARY ELIZABETH KIKAHALA ROBINSON FOSTER

Born in Honolulu on September 20, 1844, Mary Elizabeth Mikahala Robinson was the eldest daughter of James Robinson, a shipbuilder and capitalist, and of his part-Hawaiian wife, Rebecca Prever. Mary was educated at Oahu Charity School and Fort Street Catholic School.<sup>21</sup> In a small town such as Honolulu was then, it was inevitable that Mary, the daughter of a pioneer in the shipbuilding industry in Hawai‘i should meet the Foster brothers, Thomas and Daniel, two young shipbuilders who arrived from Canada in 1857 and opened a yard in Honolulu.<sup>22</sup> Mary was only 16 and Thomas was nine years her senior when they were married on May 3, 1861. The following year Thomas Foster received a loan from his father-in-law to buy a house near the intersection of Nu‘uanu Avenue with School Street, close to the Robinson’s family home. There they also became neighbors of Dr. and Mrs. Hillebrand.<sup>23</sup>

While Daniel Foster concentrated on shipbuilding, by 1875, his brother Thomas had branched out. He had a shipping agency and owned several schooners. The following year the *Mary E. Foster* was built and, by 1882, he had organized the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company with himself as president.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas did so well in business that, by 1880, he was able to buy additional land in Nu‘uanu and, when the Hillebrands left the Islands

<sup>20</sup> William F. Hillebrand, *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*, (London, New York, Heidelberg: Williams & Norgate, 1888.). The original manuscript is in the Bishop Museum Library. It was sent there from the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, in December 1935 through the efforts of Hillebrand’s son and Dr. Harold L. Lyon of the HSPA.

<sup>21</sup> *HA*, 20 Dec 1930: 1.

<sup>22</sup> Mifflin Thomas, *Schooner From Windward* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1983) 58–60; *HG*, 3 Sept. 1889: 7.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *Honolulu Directory*, 1867 unpagged; Record of Marriages, 0-22b and 0-30:75, AH; HBC, See also Hackler, 123, n.38.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, *Schooner From Windward*, 55, 58–60; *HAA* 1889: 76; *HAA* 1893: 59; *Pacific Coast Commercial Record*, May 1892: 16.



Mary Elizabeth Kikahala Robinson Foster, ca. 1861.  
Honolulu Botanical Gardens.

he also bought the doctor's holdings in Kalāwaine and Waikahalulu. The Fosters became the owners not only of spacious grounds adjoining their original home but also the doctor's beautifully planted garden.<sup>25</sup> Four years later they built a two-story house located on the site of the Hillebrands' cottage.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately Thomas Foster did not live long to enjoy his wealth and his home and garden. He was only 54 years old when he died while on a trip to California in 1889. A Honolulu newspaper described him

<sup>25</sup> *HAA* (1884) 55.

<sup>26</sup> *HAA* (1884) 55; *HAA* (1898) 103.

at that time as "... one of the best known of our city magnates, the most of his enterprises on the islands were attended with success. He was a far-seeing and keen business man, and is reputed to have left a fortune of about a quarter million dollars."<sup>27</sup>

While the Fosters were in Hawai'i they treasured Hillebrand's garden, but they were away a good deal of the year and later, when Mary Foster was a widow and lived with one or another of her sisters, often the garden was not maintained.<sup>28</sup>

After the death of her husband Mary Foster became interested in Buddhism. On a trip to Ceylon in 1893, she studied with the monks at the monastery of Anuradhapura and throughout the rest of her life she contributed to their work. In 1913, the Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala, leader of the Buddhist revival movement in Ceylon, visited Mary Foster in Honolulu. When he told her of his plans for a hospital in Colombo she gave him a generous donation with which he built the Aryuvedic Hospital and named it the Foster Robinson Hospital. The Venerable Dharmapala also sent her a gift precious to all Buddhists, a cutting from what is thought to have been the original Bo tree, *Ficus religiosa*, under which Buddha was enlightened. This tree, which she cherished, was planted in her garden and is still thriving in Foster Botanical Garden.<sup>29</sup>

Over the years Mary Foster enlarged her land holding by the purchase of additional acreage and sought professional assistance in rehabilitating her enlarged garden. Hillebrand had not left a record of the placement of the trees or identified the species in his garden so, in 1916, she asked consulting botanist Dr. Joseph P. Rock, then at the College of Hawai'i, to draw up a "Preliminary List of Plants Growing in Mrs. Mary E. Foster's Grounds"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *HG*, 3 Sep. 1889: 7.

<sup>28</sup> *The Hawaiian Planters' Record* vol.3 (1929) 60-62.

<sup>29</sup> Another story is that Dr. Hillebrand took a cutting from a Bo tree in Ceylon, which had grown from a cutting of the original Bo tree 1,000 years earlier, and established it in his garden in the 1860s. *HSB*, 7 April 1935.

<sup>30</sup> May 24, 1893, Estate of J. H. Wood sold to Mary E. Foster part of LCA 2061, PR 94, Liber 142, 189-91 and 296-97, HBC, Dec. 5, 1894, Emmanuel A. Cunha sold to Mary E. Foster part of LCA 698, PR 1894, Liber 152, 56-57, HBC; Joseph F. Rock, "Preliminary List of Plants Growing in Mrs. Mary E. Foster's Grounds, Nuuanu Avenue, Honolulu," *The Hawaiian Forester and Agriculturalist*, vol.13 (4) April 1916, 113-123.

Joseph F. Rock, was born Josef Franz Karl Rock in Vienna, Austria, in 1884. In 1908, Rock arrived in the Islands, first to work for the Department of Forestry collecting seeds and specimens of rare trees and shrubs for a herbarium and, from 1911 to 1920, as a botanist at the College of Hawai'i. In 1913, he became a naturalized citizen of the United States and promptly anglicized his name but in Hawai'i he continued to be called Pōhaku.<sup>31</sup>

#### DR. HAROLD LYON

One of the greatest and most enduring influences on Mrs. Foster's renewed concern for her garden was Dr. Harold Lloyd Lyon who arrived in the Islands in 1907. Born in Hastings, Minnesota on October 14, 1879, he received his bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. degrees in science from the University of Minnesota. Shortly after he received his doctorate in 1903, he was appointed an assistant professor and began his life-long concentration on trees, which brought him to Honolulu four years later to work for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA) as an assistant pathologist. In 1918, Lyon was appointed head of its Department of Botany and Forestry; in 1931 he became director of HSPA's Mānoa Arboretum; and in 1936, director of the HSPA Experiment Station.<sup>32</sup>

Lyon was described as tall, well built, and good looking, with searching blue eyes. He was a tireless and effective worker with an attractive and friendly manner that quickly drew people to him and his projects. As a keen forester he was naturally drawn to the old Hillebrand property on Nu'uānu Avenue and, shortly after his arrival in the islands he sought out its owner, Mrs. Mary Foster. Over the next years the forester and the landowner developed a warm friendship based on their mutual interests. Eventually he persuaded her to lease about two acres of her land to HSPA for an experiment station that he ran, and

<sup>31</sup> Robert G. Egge, "Joseph F. Rock (1884-1962)," *Principes, Journal of the Palm Society*, vol. 24, (22) (1980) 82-90.

<sup>32</sup> Harold St. John, preface to "The Pacific as a Key to Flowering Plant History" by Albert C. Smith, University of Hawai'i, H. L. Lyon Arboretum Lecture, May 20, 1970, ii-iv.

she prevailed upon him to do something about the rehabilitation of her adjacent garden. In this last endeavor Lyon may have had to start from scratch but he was armed with Rock's invaluable work as he set out to classify and clear up, as best he could, what had become almost a jungle.<sup>33</sup>

In 1919, Mrs. Foster finally signed a formal ten-year lease with HSPA and specifically asked Dr. Lyon to develop the whole property as a forest nursery. He was to grade all the land into terraces to harmonize with those already in her garden, to plant new and rare plants from time to time, and to make the HSPA nursery site essentially an addition to her garden.<sup>34</sup>

Within a year Foster Park, including the HSPA extension, was beginning to be a showplace once again. When the Pacific Science Congress met in Honolulu in 1920, its members visited the Park and reported that the preservation of the botanical garden "of the late Dr. William Hillebrand, author of the *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*, . . . would be a great benefit to botanical science, . . ."<sup>35</sup>

In 1925, the HSPA lease still had four years to run but Lyon, looking to the future, asked Mrs. Foster for a new and longer lease. He wrote her of all he had accomplished to improve the site and his regret that he had not been allowed to continue to care for her private garden, which was once again sadly neglected.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Foster, off on one of her trips, immediately cabled her agent to grant HSPA a new lease but, careful businessman that he was, Ernest H. Wodehouse upped the rent. The HSPA demurred. Lyon waded into the fray. He suggested to Mrs. Foster that the only way she could get more money

<sup>33</sup> *Honolulu Sunday Advertiser*, 2 Jan. 1938; Preface to University of Hawai'i *Occasional Paper* no. 63 (May 1956) 3; H.L. Lyon, "Ten Years in Hawaiian Forestry," *The Hawaiian Planters' Record*, vol. 33 (1929) 60-66.

<sup>34</sup> Letters, Lyon to Foster, Feb. 5 and Oct. 18, 1926, Honolulu Botanical Gardens Files (hereafter HBG Files); *The Hawaiian Planters' Record*, vol. 33 (1929) 60-66.

<sup>35</sup> "Proceedings of the Pacific Science Congress, 1920," *Special Publication of the Bernice P Bishop Museum* no. 7 (1966) Resolution #7, 35.

<sup>36</sup> H.P. Agee, director, HSPA, letter, Dec. 8, 1925, HSPA Archives; Harold Lyon, letter to Mrs. Foster, Feb. 5, 1926, Files HBG. There is an implication in this letter that at some point during the first lease Lyon was relieved of responsibility for maintaining Mrs. Foster's garden and the work was done by her agents in her absence from the Islands and was not done well.

for the garden would be to lease it out as “an oriental village.” It was in this letter that Lyon first uses the term “The Foster Botanical Garden.”

Lyon suggested that if she would give the HSPA a long lease at a reasonable rent he would personally take charge of the whole property and would “. . . immediately set about restoring and planting up the old garden and soon make the whole a glorious, living monument that would testify to your great love for nature and your good will towards men throughout all the years to come. It would soon be world famous and a shrine which all botanists would visit. It would always remain your garden.”<sup>37</sup>

How could anyone resist such an argument? Certainly not Mary Foster. HSPA got a new lease and Mary Foster began to think seriously about the future of her garden. Meanwhile Lyon was as good as his word. He continued to oversee her garden and at the same time propagate important trees and plants there for HSPA. In the next ten years he supervised the distribution of over 1,250,000 plants from the nursery on Vineyard Street.<sup>38</sup>

Before Mary Foster died, on December 19, 1930, she bequeathed her home and garden to the City of Honolulu, with \$10,000 for initial improvements and the stipulation that it should be named “Foster Park.”<sup>39</sup>

It was a generous bequest but it handed the City of Honolulu a problem for the powers that be were not sure they could afford to maintain Mrs. Foster’s garden as what they termed a tropical park and, under her will, they only had a year to make up their minds before the garden reverted to Mrs. Foster’s estate. Finally, the Park Board suggested that HSPA take over Foster Park together with a yearly contribution from the Park Board of \$2,000.<sup>40</sup>

HSPA agreed and Dr. Lyon was free to operate Foster Park and the

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Foster, cable to H. Lyon, Feb. 25, 1926; Mrs. Foster, letter to H. Lyon, Feb. 26, 1926; H. Lyon letter to Mrs. Foster, Oct. 18, 1926; all in HBG Files.

<sup>38</sup> *The Hawaiian Planters’ Record*, vol. 33 (1929) 60–66.

<sup>39</sup> *HA*, 20 Dec. 1930.

<sup>40</sup> *HSB*, 3 Jan. 1931; Minutes of Park Board, Sept. 11, 1931; Meeting of Board of Supervisors, Oct. 6, 1931, at which Resolution #478 accepting Foster property was passed and Meeting of Board of Supervisors, Oct. 13, 1931, at which it communicated with the Executors of the Foster Estate, both in DP&R files; Minutes of Park Board (hereafter MPB), Oct. 19 and Dec. 11, 1931.

HSPA grounds as a single unit. Old buildings were torn down and new ones put up, including, to Dr. Lyon's delight, a glass orchid house ordered from the Metropolitan Greenhouse Corporation of Brooklyn, New York.<sup>41</sup>

Foster Park was opened to the public on November 30, 1931. Citizens of Hawai'i and visitors came in droves. They expressed great enthusiasm for the new botanical garden and especially the orchid collection, Dr. Lyon's pride, which became one of the glories of the garden and a tremendous attraction for both serious growers and casual visitors. Among the many hybrid orchids propagated at the nursery were the Vanda Mary E. Foster, medium sized, yellowish-brown with small reddish brown spots, and the Dr. Harold L. Lyon, about five inches in diameter, dark crimson purple with a very dark lip having yellow veining and eye spots.<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Lyon continued to supervise the garden to the approval of everyone. When, in 1936, he asked for an increase of \$1,000 from the Park Board, it readily agreed and also to his revised plans for the garden, which was to be developed into a nursery and plant introduction station and a center for developing higher grades of orchids, anthurium, and other plants. Their only condition was that the garden should never be in competition with private nurseries.<sup>43</sup>

In September of 1939, the HSPA lease on Mrs. Foster's land was due to end. Dr. Lyon was anxious to have her 105,690 square feet of land purchased by the City to maintain the garden as an entity. After appraisals and counter appraisals and lengthy negotiations, the executors of Mrs. Foster's estate finally sold the property to the City for \$28,063.<sup>44</sup> Dr. Lyon was allowed to continue as director with the assistance of a resident supervisor, Colin Potter, and a small staff of gardeners.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> MPB, Jan. 13, Feb. 12, May 13, and Sept. 27, 1932.

<sup>42</sup> MPB, Dec. 11, 1931 and Aug. 14, 1933; *HA*, 28 Nov. 1931, 4: 8; *HSB* 12 Dec. 1931, 5: 7-8 and 22 Jun. 1944; J. P. Martin, "The Foster Garden Orchid Collection," *Pacific Orchid Bulletin of Hawaii*, vol. 4 (2) (July 1945) unpagged.

<sup>43</sup> MPB, Dec. 8, 1936.

<sup>44</sup> MPB, Mar. 31, May 12, May 25, June 30, 1939 and June 23, Aug. 27, and Nov. 19, 1940.

<sup>45</sup> MPB, Feb. 10, 1936, Dec. 12, 1938, Apr. 28, 1939, Sept. 30, 1941, Aug. 11, 1943, Oct. 11, 1944; Civil Service Commission to Park Board, Letter, Aug. 21, 1941, DP&R files.

In subsequent years, Dr. Lyon proposed improvements to the garden and the city departments considered them but did not act. It was not until 1954 that the Parks Board finally decided to go ahead with some of these long-discussed plans, but once approved the work went rapidly. Soon completed was a moss-rock wall around the gardens, an entrance gate at School Street, a 30-car parking area, and a moss-rock and redwood office building and comfort station.<sup>46</sup>

The highlight of the opening ceremonies, on May 15, 1955, was the unveiling of a plaque lauding the three most important creators of the Garden: William Hillebrand, the botanist and founder; Mary E. Foster, donor of much of the land, and Harold L. Lyon, its first director.

#### PAUL ROBERT WEISSICH

Paul Robert Weissich arrived in Hawai'i in 1950. Born in Mill Valley, California, he was trained as a landscape architect at the University of California. After three years in private practice in Honolulu, he was hired by the Department of Parks and Recreation of the City and County of Honolulu, where he fell under the spell of Foster Garden. Two years later he was assigned as liaison between the Parks Department and the director of the Garden and from then on he was essentially Dr. Lyon's assistant.

When Dr. Lyon died in May of 1957, Weissich was already carrying out all the duties and responsibilities of Director of Foster Garden but without the title. On the Parks Department rolls he continued to be Assistant Director of Planning and Construction, until, in March of 1961, he was finally appointed Director of the Botanical Gardens, which included Foster Garden.<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Harold Lyon had designed and nurtured Foster Garden for almost 40 years and developed it into a modern botanical garden. There were many eulogies upon his death but by far his most impor-

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of Parks & Recreation Board (hereafter MPRB), May 3, Oct. 18 and Dec. 13, 1955; Mar. 21 and May 2, 1955; *HA* 31 Oct. 1954.

<sup>47</sup> MPRB, May 4, 1953; Oct. 7, 1957; Mar. 28, 1960; Sept. 25, 1961.



tant legacy was his plan for an island-wide Hawaiian Botanical Garden, a project that was enthusiastically endorsed by the Board of Parks and Recreation.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Lyon had been developing a design for a system of Hawaiian Botanical Gardens for many years. In the spring of 1956, with Lyon's approval, Paul Weissich presented a plan to the Parks and Recreation Board that ranged far beyond the confines of Foster Garden. While it was a botanist's dream, it was also a hardheaded list of specifications needed for the creation of a number of botanical gardens in Hawai'i. It covered the requirements of a scientific staff, land, facilities for the display of plants, a nursery, a library, a herbarium, laboratories and publications, and detailed the type and amount of labor that would be necessary to achieve these goals. The plan laid out the future of the different gardens and included a practical explanation of why a Hawaiian Botanical Garden would be an asset to the Hawaiian Islands and to the nation and how the project could be financed.<sup>49</sup>

Paul Weissich inherited a difficult job. During the 1950s and 1960s, his first years at Foster Garden, there were a number of acrimonious land disputes. The first had to do with slicing off a strip of land on the *makai* side of the garden to widen Vineyard Boulevard and then another portion on the *mauka* edge to allow for the new Lunalilo Freeway.<sup>50</sup> Then there was an argument over rebuilding the Kuan Yin Tao (Koon Yum) Temple<sup>51</sup> and over the land on Nu'uuanu that the Chinese Society wanted for a Chinese language school and

<sup>48</sup> MPRB, Dec. 17, 1956; May 20 and Jun. 17, 1957; Apr. 21, 1958; *HSB* 3 May and 18 Jun. 1958.

<sup>49</sup> MPRB, Apr. 30 and Jun. 12, 1956; University of Hawai'i *Occasional Paper* no. 63 (May 1956) 23; *HSB* 18 Jun. 1956.

<sup>50</sup> LCA 11215:2. Apr. 24, 1893, Mary Foster acquired property from William H. McLean as mortgage not repaid, Liber 110, 140–141, HBC; MPRB, Nov. 3, 1938.

<sup>51</sup> Declaration of Restrictions affecting Redevelopment Sites in the Queen Emma Project designated for Public Uses, Mar. 17, 1961; Liber 3820, 19–57, HBC; Honolulu Redevelopment Agency then acquired from the City and County of Honolulu its land in Foster Park, Liber 4043, 131 and Liber 4048, 410, HBC; July 12, 1961, HRA deeded to C&C Honolulu portions of LCA 935:2, Part 2 (Keaka), LCA 4452:11 (Kalama) and LCA 942 (Kupukoa), Liber 4090, 244–249 and 250–253, HBC.

an apartment building.<sup>52</sup> Director Weissich was in and out of meetings with city boards, the city council, civic organizations, and interested citizens for years before, with the staunch assistance of Neal Blaisdell, then mayor of Honolulu, he was able, in 1964, to get all these parcels of land firmly attached to Foster Gardens.<sup>53</sup>

During the land problems, The Garden Club of Honolulu and The Outdoor Circle stepped forward to help the Garden, as they do to this day. The Garden Club provided a fund for the importation of decorative plant materials; members of The Outdoor Circle staffed the information booth at the entrance to Foster Garden and carried out a multitude of other volunteer duties.<sup>54</sup>

In 1958, Weissich also organized a volunteer advisory committee with such eminent consultants as W.W.G. Moir on orchid culture, Irwin Lane and Dr. Joseph Rock on botany, and Dr. Horace F. Clay on horticulture.<sup>55</sup>

Weissich took a three-month trip around the world in 1960 to visit botanical gardens and arrange exchange programs of plant and flower species. He returned sparking new ideas and immediately set to work implementing both long-range and short-range plans. At Foster Garden quarantine, seed germination, and lath houses were completed and a new organization, The Friends of Foster Garden, was launched "to support the aims, policies and programs of Foster Garden, so that knowledge, enjoyment and recreation concerned with plants, horticulture, gardens and related subjects may be spread and deepened among the people of Honolulu."<sup>56</sup>

Two years later Weissich developed a new concept, a Prehistoric Garden where coal age plants of 2 million years ago were nurtured.

<sup>52</sup> MPRB, May 17 and Sept. 13, 1962; *HSB* 16 Apr., 20 May, 28 Jun., 2, 6, 13, 15 Jul., 29 Aug. 1962; *HA* 6 Jul., 13, 19 Jul., 7, 8, 22, 26, 28 and 29 Aug., and 3 Oct. 1962.

<sup>53</sup> *HA* 13, 19 Jul. 1962, 8 Aug. 1963, 15 May 1964; HRA deeded to City and County of Honolulu, Liber 3820, p. 19, HBC; *HSB* 15, 19 July 1962, 7 Aug. 1963, and 8 Jan. 1964.

<sup>54</sup> MPRB, Aug. 26, 1957.

<sup>55</sup> MPRB, Jan. 13, Apr. 7 and Dec. 29, 1958; *HA* 5 July 1962.

<sup>56</sup> MPRB, Oct. 23 and Nov. 28, 1960; *HA* 2 Aug. 1960; By-Laws, Friends of Foster Gardens; *HSB* 18, 30 Jan., 6 Feb. 1961.



Paul Robert Weissich. Honolulu Botanical Gardens.

When this project was completed in 1966, thanks to a generous donation from The Garden Club, it joined other star attractions such as the orchid and palm collections to enchant visitors from the islands and abroad and thousands of school children, carefully guided by knowledgeable volunteers.<sup>57</sup> That year, Weissich and Mabel Babcock completed a training manual for volunteers and for schools entitled “Foster Garden Notes.”<sup>58</sup>

Up to 150,000 visitors tour the Garden each year, not counting thousands of school children, on individual tours, and for special events such as the late June or early July “Midsummer’s Night Gleam” and the spring and fall plant sales.

<sup>57</sup> *HA* 26 Feb. 1962, 2 Jun. 1966; *HSB* 21 Jun. 1962, 2 Jun. 1966, 20 Aug. 1969; *MPRB* Feb. 26, 1962.

<sup>58</sup> *MPRB* Sept. 23 and Oct. 7, 1957 and Jan. 17 and Feb. 21, 1966.

In 1986 Paul Weissich was named “City Manager of the Year” by the City and County of Honolulu, a fitting tribute to his over 25 years of dedication to the Honolulu Botanical Gardens and his “significant contributions to enhancing the quality of life in our community.”<sup>59</sup>

Before Weissich retired in 1990, he had also established two more botanic gardens: 200 acres at Koko Crater, a hot, dry site at the east end of O‘ahu and 400 acres at Ho‘omaluhia at the foot of the *pali* at Kāne‘ohe, a high rainfall area. Extensive plantings at both sites expanded the Honolulu Botanic Gardens’ collections to world-class status.<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Foster Garden was nurtured as a botanic garden by William Hillebrand, a German medical doctor and botanist, by philanthropist Mary E. Robinson Foster and Thomas Foster her industrialist husband, by Dr. Harold L. Lyon, an enthusiastic and scientifically trained forester, botanist and orchid lover, and by Paul R. Weissich, a landscape architect. Over the years Foster Botanic Garden has expanded beyond the dreams of its creators. It is now the core of a growing system of botanic gardens. It has expanded from a little more than four acres where Dr. Hillebrand planted some 160 species, to 20 acres at Foster Botanical Garden and other sites on O‘ahu totaling 650 acres with over 10,000 species presently propagated. The directors of Foster Botanical Gardens, a professional staff, and hundreds of volunteers have achieved many of its goals: reforestation, plant propagation, and the provision of education and pleasure for the people of Hawai‘i.

<sup>59</sup> Tom T. Nakota, Dir. Department of Parks and Recreation, City and County of Honolulu, letter to Loretta K. Fukuda, Director of Civil Service, Aug. 11, 1986, DP&R files.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Weissich, e-mail message to the author, Sept. 19, 2007.